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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study of systemic education reform in rural Alaska, this case study examines the school improvement process undertaken in Yupiit School District (YSD). YSD consists of three Yupiaq villages in southwest Alaska that joined together in 1984 to form the Yupiit Nation and to run their own schools. In 1992 a district-level leadership team, trained in the Alaska Onward to Excellence school improvement process, called the first community-wide meetings to discuss the values and beliefs that should be passed on to the next generation. The district team then compiled community values and beliefs, drew up a draft mission statement, and listed tentative student goals. After extensive community feedback, the YSD school board adopted the following student goals: knowledge of Yup'ik values, culture, and subsistence skills; preparation for work and further education; respect and positive attitudes toward life, learning, and community; development as law-abiding citizens; and ability to communicate in Yup'ik and English. Local leadership teams then identified the goal of greatest concern in each community and developed specific actions to advance that goal. By the third year of the process, results included improved student attendance, increased parent and elder participation, provision of curricular training, and closer school-community cooperation. This cooperation was particularly noteworthy in the development of a seasonally-organized cultural curriculum. Through this curriculum, everyone in the community becomes a teacher, every place is a potential classroom, and every community activity constitutes a learning opportunity. (SV)

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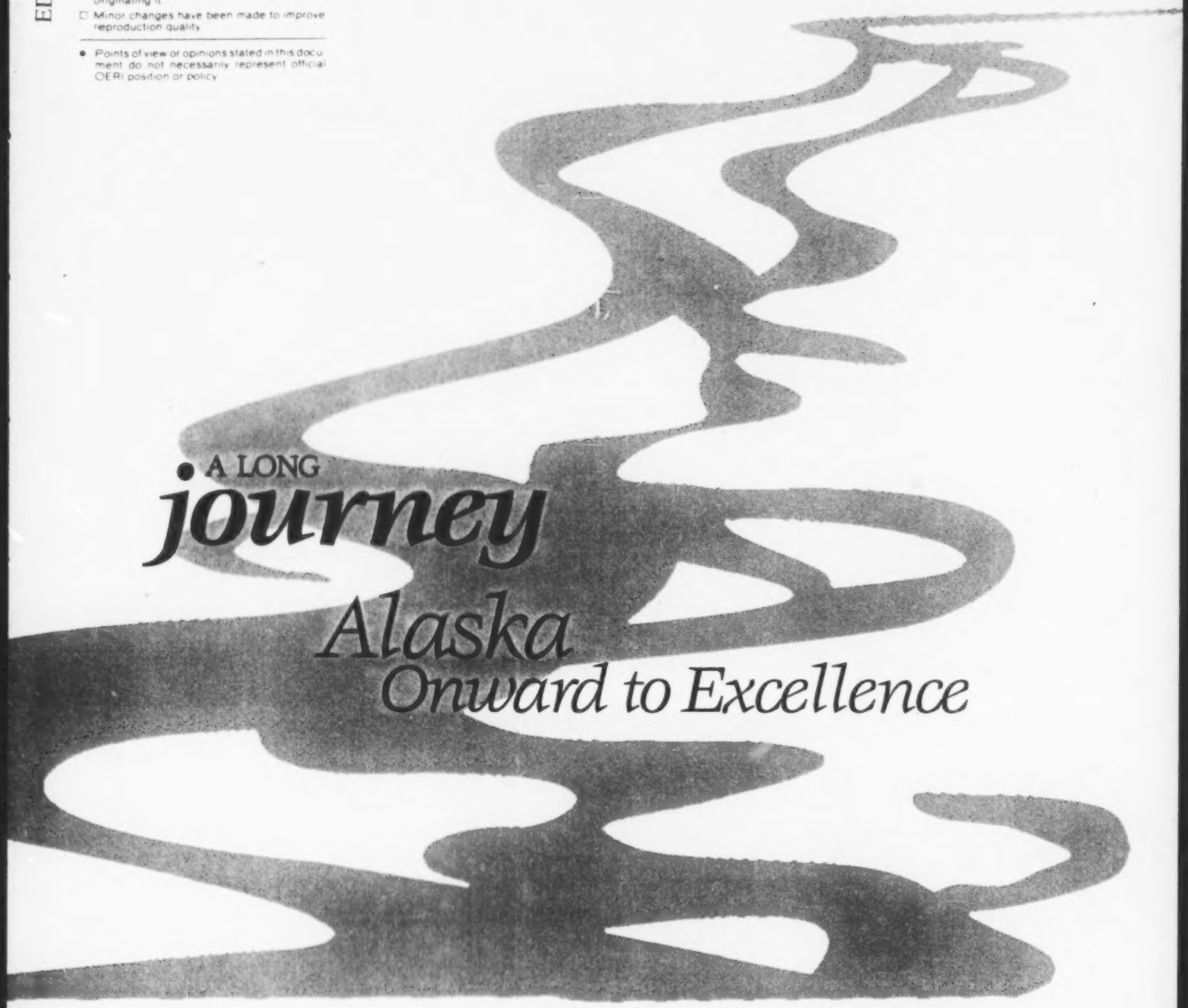

A LONG *journey*

Alaska Onward to Excellence

YUPIIT/TULUKSAK SCHOOLS

RC 022203

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A Long Journey: Alaska Onward to Excellence in Yupiit/Tuluksak Schools

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A LONG JOURNEY: ALASKA ONWARD TO EXCELLENCE IN YUPIIT/TULUKSAK SCHOOLS

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The mission of the Yupiit School District and community is to ensure that all students master the basic skills, develop self-confidence, become self-reliant, possess knowledge of traditional Yup'ik ways, become fluent in Yup'ik and English languages, establish healthy lifestyles, become lifelong learners, and succeed in any environment.

The above mission statement was adopted by the Yupiit School District (YSD) board in the early stages of implementation of the Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) school improvement process. Embedded in the YSD mission statement are many of the issues that school districts throughout rural Alaska are grappling with as they pursue efforts at school reform and improvement. The following case study will attempt to document how the various participants contributed to the YSD school improvement process as it has evolved since it was initiated in 1992 and the impact the process has had on the educational experiences of students in the district, with a particular focus on the village of Tuluksak.

The Yupiit School District

The Yupiit School District consists of three Yupiaq villages (Akiachak, Akiak, and Tuluksak) on the lower Kuskokwim river of southwest Alaska that have joined together to form the Yupiit Nation and to run their own schools (Fienup-Riordan, 1990). Before 1976, the elementary schools in the three communities were administered by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (Akiachak and Akiak) and the Alaska State Operated School System (Tuluksak) (Collier, J., 1973; Collier, J., 1974; Collier, M., 1979). With the establishment of the Lower Kuskokwim School District, headquartered in nearby Bethel, the villages came under pressure to become members of the surrounding regional district. The villages resisted this pressure, however, and over the subsequent 10 years of jurisdictional disputes, the schools were administered in various combinations of local,

regional, state, and federal control. At one point, from 1980 to 1985, an elementary school in Akiak operated as a "contract school" under the BIA, while the regional district continued to also operate an elementary school as well as a high school, all in a community with a total population of under 200 (Madsen, 1983; Kurz, 1983). The evolution of the concerns of the villagers was summarized in the following passage from Kawagley (1995) in a study of the educational experiences of Yupiaq people in the region:

> Shortly after Alaska acquired statehood in 1959, the Yupiaq of the villages of Akiak, Akiachak and Tuluksak had watched their hegemony slip further away from their villages. Yupiaq culture was not being used to enhance and strengthen the Yupiaq way of life. As long as control was in the hands of the state and the school district, the Yupiaq people felt that no change would occur. It was the wish of the villagers that education reflect the culture of the village. (pg. 39-40)

In 1984, the three villages asserted their tribal authority and formed the Yupiit Nation as a local political and governmental entity (which has since expanded to other villages in the region) with the following stated purposes:

1. To strengthen unity among the Yupiit of Southwest Alaska
2. To promote Yupiit rights and interests on the local, national, and international levels of policy development affecting the Yupiit
3. To ensure Yupiit participation in political, economic and social institutions that we deem relevant
4. To promote greater self-sufficiency of the Yupiit in Southwest Alaska
5. To ensure the endurance and growth of the Yupiit culture and societies for both present and future generations
6. To promote long-term management and use of nonrenewable resources in western Alaska and incorporate such resources in the present and future development of Yupiit economies, taking into account other Yupiit interests (Kawagley, 1995; 41)

One of the first of the "other Yupiit interests" to which the Yupiit Nation directed its attention was the area of education. In 1985, the three villages withdrew their schools from the Lower Kuskokwim School District and petitioned the state to form the Yupiit School District, so they could run their own schools "to ensure the endurance and growth of the Yupiit culture and societies for both present and future generations." Establishing

a new school district was no easy task, however, and much energy was expended the first few years dealing with funding shortages, turnover of personnel, curricular changes, and conflicts among key players. School board members took an active role in statewide forums on educational issues impacting rural schools and gained respect throughout the state for their advocacy on behalf of their communities and students. In 1990, board member Mike Williams was elected to the Board of Directors of the Alaska Association of School Boards, and he has since been appointed to the State Board of Education.

The YSD School Board was determined to build an educational program that would take into account Yupiit interests while at the same time preparing students to succeed in the world beyond the Yupiit Nation. The latter concern became especially acute in 1988, when the Alaska legislature mandated standardized achievement tests in all public schools. The state began issuing an annual report in which students in rural schools were ranked among the lowest in the nation, and the Yupiit schools were at the bottom with a composite percentile ranking ranging from 3 to 9 %. By 1998, those issues had become even more acute, with new legislative mandates putting additional pressure on rural schools to measure up to outside standards.

Life in a Yupiit Village

Tuluksak is a small village located on the southern bank of the Tuluksak River, which empties into the Kuskokwim River. It has a population of approximately 375 predominately Yupiat people. It is a typical Alaskan village with mostly state designed and subsidized homes. There are a few families that continue to live in their own modestly constructed homes. These usually consist of one big room serving as the living/kitchen area with one or two rooms serving as bedrooms. Heating and cooking in these homes is from an oil-fired cook-stove. To augment cooking space and provide quicker heating, the families often rely on Coleman white-gas-fueled camp stoves. This very often is the choice for cooking food. The newer government-funded homes usually have a furnace with a separate cook stove.

Transportation in the summer through the village is by three- and four-wheeled all-terrain vehicles plus a few privately owned trucks. As summer approaches, most families move to their fish camps on the banks of the Tuluksak and Kuskokwim rivers,

where the mode of transportation is aluminum boats with outboard motors. At fish camp, the families live in wall tents stretched over wooden frames. Each tent has a wood stove, wooden beds, table, and make-do chairs. The biggest building is usually the smokehouse, constructed of plywood or corrugated metal on a wooden frame with an earthen floor.

The families truly work together during the fishing season. Everyone pitches in to contribute to the task of putting away fish for the winter. There are a number of families whose older children do not want to participate and so stay in the village. This becomes troublesome for the separated families: education in the traditional ways is being forsaken, and the school has not been able to fill the gap.

Following is a summary profile of each of the three Yupiit schools at the time of the initiation of the AOTE process:

Akiachak	Akiak	Tuluksak
First sch. estab.: 1930	First sch. estab.: 1911	First sch. estab.: 1930
Elem. students: 93	Elem. students: 61	Elem. students: 81
Elem. teachers: 7	Elem. teachers: 4	Elem. teachers: 5
Sec. students: 45	Sec. students: 14	Sec. students: 26
Secondary teachers: 7*	Secondary teachers: 6*	Secondary teachers: 6*

*secondary teachers include part-time instructors for certain subject areas

Alaska Onward to Excellence in the Yupiit Schools

Back in October 1992, notices began to appear in the communities of Akiachak, Akiak, and Tuluksak announcing "The First Onward to Excellence Meeting" to be held in each of the local schools the following week, hosted by the Yupiit School District AOTE leadership team. The announcement in Tuluksak indicated that "it is important that Elders and community members come and help plan for the future of their children." To provide a little added incentive for people to attend, it indicated that refreshments and substantial door prizes (fuel oil, rifles, etc.) would be offered. These meetings were the first of what became a series of well-attended community gatherings over the next several years, focusing on involving elders, parents, students, and teachers in the remaking of the YSD educational programs.

The leadership for the village meetings came from a district-level leadership team that was formed following a series of three Onward To Excellence orientation workshops

for the school district administration and board members, sponsored by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The venues for the workshops progressed from Portland to Anchorage to Akiachak as the district took on increasing responsibility for the improvement effort, which was characterized as "not just another project, but a long journey." At these workshops, the district leadership was briefed on the OTE school improvement process, and some basic assumptions under which they would proceed were presented, discussed, and agreed to by all participants.

Those assumptions and their corollaries were as follows:

1. The focus will be on student learning
    - All students can learn successfully
    - What students learn may change
    - How well students learn will change
2. Everyone must be committed
    - Community and schools share leadership
    - Parents are full partners in the learning process
    - Schools and their communities are accountable for learning success for all students
    - The district and its community are accountable for expecting, supporting, and monitoring school efforts
3. Everyone will learn together
    - Improvement equals learning
    - Learn before design
    - Everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher
4. Learning success will be measured
    - Learning will be measured in all goal areas
    - New ways of measurement will be needed
    - Additional measures must be developed

These assumptions were to guide the district through a "strategic improvement process" that involved a cycle of introducing the effort, setting direction, establishing priorities, developing plans, implementing the plans, and monitoring progress in preparation for renewing the effort. The key to implementing the process was the district

leadership team, which was made up of two board members, one student, three paraprofessionals, two teachers, one principal, and the superintendent. Seven of the ten team members were Native people from the communities. The role of the leadership team was to lead the district-wide effort by:

- Establishing importance for the effort
- Motivating people to become involved
- Recruiting people to participate
- Planning and organizing the effort
- Guiding, facilitating and supporting task groups
- Monitoring the overall effort

Developing the Yupiit School District Mission and Goals

Under the guidance of Bob Blum and Tom Olson from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the YSD leadership team identified the following issues as a starting point for their effort:

- What should we keep from the past as we move into the future?
- How do people think about the future?
- What are our present paradigms about schools?
- How to lead the improvement effort in the district
- How to get input from the villages

With these considerations in mind, the leadership called the first community-wide meetings across the district to initiate a discussion on the vision, mission, values, and goals that people of the YSD wanted their schools to strive toward. Participants in the first meetings (which were very well attended in every community) were organized into groups of elders, parents, students, and staff, and each group addressed the following questions:

- What was life like when you were a child?
- What was school like when you were a child?
- How has life changed?
- How have schools changed?

- What should we keep from our past?

The topics raised in these meetings, ranging from traditional survival skills to the quality of pencils in the former BIA schools, were summarized on sheets of paper that were hung around the classroom walls and later typed up and made available to everyone in the community. Of particular importance in planning the future curriculum were the topics generated in response to the last question, "What should we keep from our past?" In addressing that question, for example, the Tuluksak participants identified the following items:

- Subsistence
- Survival skills
- Culture
- To be knowledgeable
- Values should be taught
- Traditions
- Ways of life
- Nature
- Discipline
- Customs of our elders
- Eskimo dances
- Wilderness survival
- Gathering plants for tools and food
- Spring camp, fall camp, fish camp
- Work on key to success
- Parent/teacher interaction
- Communication
- Respect for elders/young/nature
- Family tree
- Language
- Helping others
- Organized activities
- Stories and legends

- Sharing
- Caring for others

The next two community meetings, which were held within a month of the first meeting, focused people's attention on identifying and articulating the particular values and beliefs that the community members wished to pass on to the next generation, based on which a draft mission statement for the school district and a set of student goals/outcomes could be formulated. The ideas from the three communities were drawn together by the district leadership team and formed into a statement of "Community Values and Beliefs," which read as follows:

- We value our traditional way of life, which includes:
  - Sharing and caring
  - Survival skills/subsistence living
  - Language/culture
  - Respect for one's self, elders, parents, nature, students, teachers, others, and others' property
  - Self-respect, mutual respect, and relating to others
  - Traditional games, tools, clothing
- We value discipline in the home and in the school that builds:
  - Self discipline
  - Responsibility to be productive
  - Personal initiative
  - Willingness to abide by rules
  - Knowledge of consequences
- We value listening as an important part of learning
- We value seeking new knowledge
- We value learning from the past to prepare for the future

The district leadership team also produced a draft mission statement and a list of proposed student goals/outcomes that attempted to embody the above set of values and beliefs, drawing as well on the input from the community meetings. These drafts were returned to the communities and schools for further review and refinement and eventually

became the focal point for a district-wide Education Fair held in Akiachak on March 19, 1993. The fair attracted a great deal of attention and attendees, including a television crew from CNN, which carried a feature story on the Yupiit School District on its national news broadcast. With extensive feedback from the workshops held at the fair, the leadership team reworked the draft mission statement and goals one more time for presentation to the School Board. Finally, at a regular meeting of the YSD School Board in May, the mission statement at the opening of this case study and the following student goals/outcomes were adopted:

Goal A: Know the way of life and history of Yup'ik families and what is important to know from the outside world as a result of living and functioning in both cultures. Students shall become the best-educated Yup'ik hunters, fishers, and gatherers in the world.

- Learn to become skillful in the subsistence way of living (gathering, hunting fishing crafts, preserving, etc.)
- Listening to advice from Elders
- Learning Yup'ik values from parents and Elders
- Keeping traditional ways
- Survival skills
- Giving and sharing
- Accept and respect other's culture
- Knowing Yup'ik heritage and global cultures
- Sense of responsibility toward education
- Group involvement (making decisions and solving problems)
- Knowing stories and legends of their Yup'ik ancestors
- Know Yup'ik lifestyles, village history, science and language
- Hunting without conflict
- Understanding broad cultural concepts and ideas, not just activities
- Cultural heritage as a school curriculum
- Parenthood - being better role models and community leaders

Goal B: Learning and understanding to be prepared for education and work.

- Know contents of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act
- Know the value of money and how to budget money for better living
- Working knowledge of technology
- Knowledge of names of landmarks
- Prepared for college and careers
- Taking appropriate subjects to reach their goals
- Work skills
- Able to listen and understand
- Know about Alaska history and use history to better understand the future

Goal C: Have respect and a positive attitude toward life and learning, school, self, and harmonious community.

- Value and have interest in a good education
- Have good eating habits, adequate exercise, and rest
- Respect teachers, elders and others
- Love one another
- Self-respect
- Working in unity (teachers, children, parents, and community)
- Giving encouragement to others
- High self-esteem
- Being good role models for younger people
- Feeling comfortable with others
- Having personal pride
- Having positive attitudes
- Knowing how to respect others and others' property

Goal D: Being law-abiding citizens regardless of where one lives. Communities where people care for each other and share with each other.

- Possess self-discipline
- Be prompt and dependable
- Resist self-destructive behaviors
- Self-reliant
- Self-directed
- Drug free
- Leadership
- Knowing what is right and wrong
- Hunting without conflict
- Accept consequences of one's actions
- Having fun in a natural way

Goal E: Ability to read write and speak the Yup'ik and English languages.

- Good communication and interactions with any race
- Know Yup'ik and English fluently from grade school to high school
- Able to read and write
- Pictorial writing (using Helper Nick's writing)
- Know and follow rules to achieve goals
- Know the original Yup'ik writing
- Learn to deal with mistakes and try better solutions

With the mission and goals in place, the AOTE project wound down for the year. Kelly Tonsmeire of the Alaska Staff Development Network, which helped sponsor the AOTE project with funding from the Meyer Memorial Trust, summarized the mood of the district as follows:

> According to the district representatives, the project is succeeding in empowering local, rural Native people in improving the quality of education in their communities. All agreed that the major challenge for year two will be to keep the momentum going and maintaining the high level of enthusiasm among villagers, school and central office staff. One of the difficulties encountered during year one was achieving a balance between traditional village values and the needs of a modern, rapidly changing society. These differences will never be completely resolved, but we are making progress through the dialogue that has been initiated through the AOTE process. Parents and other adults in all project communities are very concerned about the quality of education and have very high expectations for their schools. (Tonsmeire, 1991, p. 2)

We are pleased with the progress being made in spite of the unique challenges we have to face in working in remote, cross-cultural communities. We are continuing to make steady progress toward accomplishing project goals and objectives. Alaska Native community members are developing additional leadership skills. We are pleased with the ownership for the project that is developing among Native community members, and even more importantly, we are particularly gratified with the strong leadership role Alaska Native community members, especially Elders, are providing in implementing the project in every community. (p. 8)

Implementing the Yupiit School District Mission and Goals

Once the AOTE process had helped the Yupiit School District establish a direction for itself, the next step was to implement the goals that would achieve the mission adopted by the board. While the direction-setting exercise required district-wide leadership, the implementation phase would require a much greater degree of site-level commitment and initiative, so a "village leadership team" was established at each site, made up of 7 to10 people from the school and community, with the principal, a teacher, and a community member serving as the core. In addition, an orientation workshop for YSD school staff was provided by Bob Blum from NWREL during the staff in-service session just before the beginning of the school year, as a way to gain maximum staff understanding of and participation in the AOTE process as the district moved into the crucial implementation phase. This was especially important for new staff who had not been part of the previous development year. The perceptions of the YSD staff regarding

AOTE were summarized by Jim Kushman, who had joined the NWREL staff as AOTE project evaluator and had distributed a questionnaire to the staff following the orientation session:

> Overall, the Yupiit school staff members participating in the meeting expressed positive attitudes towards Alaska OTE and the future. The major perceived benefit is building a new school/community partnership. A few individuals already focused on student outcomes, and hopefully, this will increase as Alaska OTE penetrates into the schools and classrooms. However, there were some nagging concerns about follow through with the hard work ahead. There was also a concern about maintaining strong village commitment and involvement. While the orientation meeting was well-received, this one meeting in itself was not enough to provide school participants with a full understanding of their role in the Alaska OTE process. The participants expressed a desire for more training, information, and consultation as the process moves forward (Tonsmeire, 1991).

To help sustain the momentum in the YSD communities and to foster greater school staff involvement, two more workshops were provided by the NWREL staff for the district leadership team as well as the newly created village leadership teams. The emphasis at this point for the village teams was to set up a process for each site to select a "priority improvement goal" from the list that had been adopted by the board in May, which would serve as the focal point for the year's AOTE efforts at the local level. The idea was to identify the goal that was of greatest concern in each community and focus on developing an improvement effort around that goal, rather than trying to dō everything at once and possibly becoming overwhelmed. Following a series of village input meetings over the next few months hosted by the village leadership teams, each village identified a priority goal on which to focus its school improvement efforts. The Akiachak team chose to concentrate on Goal C, developing respect and a positive attitude, while Akiak and Tuluksak identified Goal E, Yup'ik and English language development, as their primary concern. The significance of this exercise in making concrete what the AOTE process was about is reflected in the following excerpt from the report to the YSD superintendent following the meeting:

> Goal chosen for next year is: Have a positive attitude toward life and learning, also toward school, self, and community.
>
> **Group A**: Keep communication open between school and community
> How? Contact parents throughout the year by phone, home visits, send letters to make positive comments about their students.

Group B: Develop Elder Spiritual Camp to develop positive attitude (i.e., summer school and/or similar idea).
How? Get parents and Elders involved in the process of writing a grant for a Spirit Camp.

Group C: Have community, parents, Elder involvement.
How? Parents and Elders involved in school. Have a day for parents and teachers to get together (a lunch/brunch/tea) at the start and at the end of the year. This would break the ice and introduce teachers to parents.

Group D: Parents attempting to bring about a positive attitude toward self, school and learning.
How? Encourage students to come to school on time. Parents need to model to set a good example. Have children learn to be of service to others. Give children more responsibility. Parents need to be at home with their children.

Group E: Improve Cultural Heritage Day by linking cultural heritage with academic learning.
How? Planned absence from school: What/who/where is the activity? Have homework assignment/date for completion of work. Have a project during Cultural Heritage Days and have students present project at school. Presentation would represent their grade instead of report card.

[summary comment by the report writer] At the risk of repeating myself I want to say, this meeting was by far the most positive of the year. I keep thinking they can't get better, but every one is better than the last one. A staff person at the high school told me the OTE meetings were one of the best things the district has going. He felt so excited to talk with parents/fellow staff persons/village leaders and Elders to find ways to improve the respect/self esteem of our children. The majority of the persons at the meeting were proactive and ready to start a plan of action.

The remaining task for the year was to begin preparing village and district "profiles" to aid in planning the school improvement strategies and against which to measure any progress that might be made. Attendance at the now-annual YSD Parent Education Conference in March continued to grow, and work began on the development of a new bilingual curriculum as well as a new high-school curriculum for the district. At the end-of-year AOTE leadership planning meeting in May, the leadership teams identified the following as the most significant accomplishments of the AOTE project to date (Tonsmiere, 1994, p. 6-7):

- Village involvement has been a big success, and everyone in the villages knows about AOTE.
- Student involvement has been high.
- Communities are becoming less dependent and more self-directed.
- We're beginning to get a picture of what is meant by postsecondary success because of AOTE meetings. Success means more than academics. Success in schools can best be achieved through a partnership.
- AOTE has opened the door for change — substantive and specific change, not just change for the sake of change. AOTE has changed attitudes by making people more open to change.
- The fact that villages picked similar goals was encouraging. Many villages chose language and culture development as their priority goal.
- Community meetings have already prompted some immediate changes in schools. For example, a Native dance program in response to the community's concern about the death of the Yupiit culture.
- Having a plan for change will help maintain direction and provide a road map for the districts rather than trying new programs as "band-aids" without any direction for involvement or goals. The districts were set up for failure without direction, but AOTE has provided the process to succeed in whatever they choose as a priority.
- Village involvement in the mission/goal setting process was a success.
- Village teams were successful in continuing village involvement through year two and the teams learned from any early mistakes.
- The mission and goal statements truly represent the issues on people's minds and should hold up over a long-term improvement process.
- AOTE has accelerated the change process that is going on statewide in three areas:
  1. There is now a two-way exchange between the districts and their communities, with districts asking, "What can we do for the community?"
  2. Leadership is moving from the central office to the principal — principals have to be responsive to their communities as well as their superintendent and this is making some principals uncomfortable.
  3. The issue of how to integrate Native culture and language is being taken on in a more in-depth way.

In addition to the above accomplishments, the leadership team also identified several areas of concern that would need to be addressed in future efforts of the AOTE project. These were summarized by Tonsmeire as follows (p. 8):

- Given high staff turnover, we need a plan and direction (mission and goals) to have some stability over time. But there is some staff resistance to full community partnership. There are some principals and teachers who don't want the community setting the direction.
- The decline in student performance at elementary and high school levels is

a concern as well as the peer pressure to *not* succeed (doing well in school is not "cool").

- High expectations and accountability. Teachers need to set high expectations and standards and people need to be accountable for results (e.g., all kindergarten students will perform up to grade level). But accountability does not mean people losing their jobs. It means people taking responsibility for the failure to meet a high standard and making adjustments next year.
- Importance of parent/home support for student success in postsecondary school. We need to define in specific terms the kind of support from families that will help young people succeed in college. We need to move beyond talking only generally about parent support and define and communicate what that means.
- There is a tension between the Western model of education and the Native priority on language and culture. This becomes a problem with high staff turnover (many teachers discover they can't handle village life) and there is need to continually educate new teachers. This means that time must be found for staff development.
- Since Native language and culture are fast disappearing, how to approach bilingual education is a controversial issue. Can we reach agreement on what it takes to achieve fluency in both English and Yup'ik? People do not yet agree on the best way to do this.
- A major issue is how to integrate AOTE with ongoing district activities. If AOTE is to succeed as a long-term improvement process, it must become part of the way districts and schools do business, rather than an add-on project.

With the above accomplishments and challenges in mind, the Yupiit School District moved into its third year of the AOTE school improvement process, experiencing a combination of enthusiasm and anxiety. The new year began with a workshop for the village core teams, sponsored by the NWREL and focused on developing a prescription and action plan for addressing the priority goal that had been selected by each village the previous year. After reviewing research related to the underlying themes of the selected goals and examining techniques for preparing action plans, the teams identified the following as actions that the district needed to begin implementing:

- Hiring new teachers that are bilingual Yup'ik/English speakers
- Starting a youth and elders program so young and old can communicate on a weekly basis
- Starting an alcohol/drug abuse prevention program that is culturally based
- Offering daily classes in Yup'ik language

- Monthly cultural activities hosted by the schools

A second focus of the workshop was to provide training for district and village leadership teams to develop district and village-level student/school performance profiles. The data to be assembled for these profiles included the following:

- Attendance data
- Tardiness data
- Standardized test results for past four years
- Dropout rates
- Success after high school survey results

Despite ups and downs in attendance and participation in AOTE meetings and occasional confusion about what needed to be done, by the third year of the project there was enough momentum built up in each village that the changes being implemented in the schools were becoming noticeable. Student attendance began to show improvement, parent and elder participation was on the rise, technology was being integrated into the schools in new ways, training in new curricular areas was being provided, and in general the school and community were showing signs of working more closely together. Nowhere was this more evident than in the work that was being done on developing a new Bilingual and Cultural Heritage Program for the district. A committee headed up by Mary George, one of the Yup'ik teachers in Akiachak, began to compile all the information that had been accumulated on various aspects of the Yup'ik culture and organize it into a coherent cultural heritage curriculum. As a theme for the work they had undertaken, they adopted the statement, "Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children," and with the support of the elders, community members, and the teaching staff, they produced the following seasonally organized "Circle of Life" curriculum outline:

<u>Winter</u>

Yup'ik language
dissecting
skinning
snowmachine safety
traditional chants

trapping
grass weaving
Christmas celebrations
Slaviq celebrations
skin sewing
local animals
animal tracks
traditional clothes
winter survival
Eskimo Olympics
beading
dog sleds
jigging
carving
snaring

Spring

Education Conference
Yup'ik language
wilderness survival
canoe safety
pike jigging
cleaning birds
local birds
Easter celebrations
kinship
weather
feasting
dancing
Eskimo dolls

Summer

medicinal plants
Yup'ik language
subsistence living
fish camp
fish cutting
preserving
boat safety
gardening
tundra plants
fishing
bush berries
edible plants
transportation

salmon berries

Fall

Yup'ik language
moose hunting
berry picking
lush fish jigging
plants and seeds
string plays
gun safety
fall colors
fish traps
Yup'ik names
tundra animals
orienteering
tundra berries
cranberries
gathering mouse food
story-knife telling

The formulation of the curriculum embodied in the YSD Bilingual and Cultural Heritage Program outlined above clearly captures the mission and goals adopted by the district and communities. It also obviously requires a closer working relationship between the schools and community, with the expertise required to implement the curriculum shared by members of the community as well as the teaching staff. While everyone recognized that it would take considerable additional work to effectively integrate the Yup'ik components into the curriculum, the district now had some concrete areas on which to focus its efforts. Provisions were made for students to get permission to participate in traditional subsistence activities and have it count toward their school attendance, with appropriate documentation. In addition, a cultural activities report card was developed to supplement the regular academic report card for the district. The development and integration of the Yup'ik curriculum was to continue over a period of several years, but the foundation had been laid, and a renewed level of enthusiasm had been established in both the school and community as they moved forward in this new arena together.

The last formal AOTE workshop for the YSD leadership teams was held in Tuluksak in January 1995, with a focus on the steps that would be taken to follow

through and continue the school improvement effort beyond the AOTE initiative itself. This was followed by the annual YSD Education Conference in February, which highlighted the new Yup'ik curriculum and was once again very well attended. As the third year wound down, the YSD School Board voted to continue the process they had begun three years earlier, putting the experience they had acquired and the data that had been gathered to use in pursuing Goals 2000 funding for the district. They also elected to maintain leadership continuity in the district by appointing Reid Straabe, the associate superintendent, to take over when Leland Dishman, the superintendent who had led the district through the AOTE effort, resigned at the end of the year. Superintendent Straabe made the following pledge as he took on administrative responsibilities for AOTE:

> The district will continue with the process and teams in its evolution of a recently adopted vision, "Elitnaurvimteni Ciutmurtukut" (In Our Schools, We Are Moving Forward). The district will maintain a unified partnership among parents, school and community to promote shared responsibility for educating the students of the Yupiit School District. The vision includes the goals adopted via AOTE, as well as site goals, board and administration goals and involvement of the parents and community. The district will host regular meetings of the administrative, village and community leadership teams to discuss the improvement of education at the site level. (Barnhardt, 1996, p. 27)

In the meantime, Kelly Tonsmeire summarized the results of the AOTE project as follows in his report to the Meyer Memorial Trust:

> It is clear to us that district and village teams are becoming more focused on the AOTE mission and goals and that the AOTE mission and goals are becoming more and more of a driving force in district-wide and school-based decisions. Schools and districts are targeting their limited resources in order to achieve the AOTE goals, as well.
>
> Skills of both educators and community members involved in the AOTE process have increased dramatically, and district and village action plans have become much more specific and coherent. With each visit effective teamwork among village team members becomes more apparent. Considerable progress is also being made in integrating the AOTE process into the daily life of target schools and districts. AOTE participants are also recognizing the importance of collecting good data about student performance and using that along with sound research findings to make better decisions. (Tonsmerie, 1994, p. 11)

The Impact of AOTE in the Yupiit School District

The Alaska Onward to Excellence school improvement process has been the basis of numerous school and community meetings and planning activities in each of the Yupiit communities over the past five years. Has all of this activity produced any noticeable effects? While AOTE has not been the only factor impacting education in the Yupiit School District since 1992, it has been a consistent presence and has provided a unifying theme (mission) and direction (goals) for the schools. It is fair, therefore, to look at some of the available information to see if there are noticeable improvements in the level of community involvement in the school as well as in the overall performance of the school and students that can be attributed to the AOTE effort.

In 1997–98, 17 Tuluksak parents were interviewed by the research team to determine their level of awareness of AOTE and their involvement in the school. Sixty-five percent of these parents indicated that they had been informed of the program, and 75% felt that the school provided enough information regarding what it was doing. Seventy-five percent indicated they had attended meetings, but the majority did not visit the school for any other purpose.

On the question, "how well do you feel you know your child?" 45% of the parents indicated that they did not know their child very well. A similar indication of ambivalence in relationships between parents and students in the Yupiit communities was reflected in a 1995 "Survey of Alaska High School Students." Of the 65 YSD students (13 from Tuluksak) who responded, 61% indicated they "do not believe they and their neighbors want the same thing from their community and 39% feel that people in their community do not share the same values" (Seyfrit, 1995, p. 2). On the other hand, 89% feel they belong and feel at home in their community, and 80% say their community is a good place for them to live (p. 2).

When asked about their attitudes toward themselves, the responses from the students reflected that their self-esteem was very high. Eighty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that they are persons of worth and 89% feel they have a number of good qualities. In contrast, 27% did not feel they have much to be proud of, and 73% sometimes think they are no good at all (Seyfrit, 1995, p. 2). If their responses are truly a reflection of a high self-esteem, these students should be doing well in school, in the

community, in the state, or anywhere else. The incentive to excel and succeed should be shown by achievement in school and in the community as people who are trying to become the very best that they can possibly become. However, they appear to encounter some kind of invisible barrier as they strive to become successful in the academic and community worlds in which they are situated.

Based on the1996–97 YSD report card to the public, the attendance rate in Tuluksak school has been fairly stable at 88%. However, the transience rate has tripled from school year 1995–96, and the dropout rate for students in grades 7 through12 has almost doubled from 1995–96, going from 4.9% to 9.3%. On the positive side, the graduation rate has increased from 20% to 29% in the same time period, though that is still too low. Among the three villages, Tuluksak ranks lowest on the measures of student learning, except in elementary writing. In the standardized test scores, students in Tuluksak rank at the 2nd percentile in reading at the 8th grade, with a high in the 19th percentile for 11th-grade mathematics. Overall, there have been slight increases in student performance from 1996 to 1997.

During the spring of 1998, the Tuluksak high-school seniors were interviewed as a group by one of the village research assistants. In general, the seniors expressed frustration that they were not being challenged in their classes and that they are being allowed to "just get by." However, the earlier survey of high-school students from throughout YSD found that most students believe that they do get strong encouragement to do well from school and home (Seyfrit, 1995, p. 9). Yet in Tuluksak, the graduation rate for 1997 was 29%.

The survey also seems to indicate an ambivalence as to what "doing well in school" really means. Attitudes toward school indicate that 98% of students believe high school should prepare them for jobs, and 94% believe it should prepare them for college or a university education (Seyfrit, 1995, p. 2). But 23% of the students feel that they do not have to go to college to be a success, and 73% think YSD will prepare them to enter a trade or technical school to compete for good jobs anywhere in the U.S. (p. 9). Furthermore, some of the students report that their parents (9%) or grandparents (25%) do not want them to go to college (p. 9). This is of greater significance than the numbers might indicate, for when asked who had the most influence on how they felt about school,

the students reported parents as having the greatest influence (37%), with other relatives at 22% and teachers at 13% (p. 12).

When asked to rate the relative importance of various school subjects, the students ranked them as follows:

Native culture and language (78%)

Career education (78%)

English, reading, and writing (72%)

Mathematics (67%)

Health (53%)

Business skills (37%)

Mechanical skills (36%)

Foreign languages (14%)

The two subject areas in which students wished they could get more help were math (56%) and English (40%).

The students also rated a list of possible goals they might pursue and rated the following as "very important:"

Being a good parent (79%)

Earning good grades in high school (76%)

Attending a college or university (66%)

Learning traditional skills (60%)

Playing organized sports (58%)

Learning new skills (57%)

Subsistence hunting or fishing (53%)

Maintaining Native traditions and culture (53%)

Respecting all people (52%)

Ambivalence toward the duality of the students' opportunities and aspirations is further reflected in their response to a question about remaining in the region or moving away. Ninety percent of YSD students feel that living in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region is important to them, but 74% also felt that moving away from the area was important to them.

This same ambivalence and mixed message regarding the purpose of education is reflected in the curriculum offerings and practices in the schools. While everyone agrees on the need for the school to prepare the students for life in both the local and global context, there is little consistency in how this is addressed on a day-to-day basis. There are bits and pieces of each, but no cumulative, integrated approach that helps students (or teachers and parents) sort through the confusion and ambiguities involved.

For example, the bilingual/bicultural program has been in place in Tuluksak for a long time and has not worked at producing bilingualism in the students, although that is what everyone desires. The Yupiat people have been asking the school to help them reenliven their language and life-ways. However, the school has been unable to take the steps that must be taken to accommodate this major shift in paradigm to reengage the incentive to excel and succeed on the part of the Yupiat youngsters. How do the Yupiat people reinstill self-discipline in the young people if the schools are unable to contribute to strengthening the Yupiaq language and life-ways? Why is quality education not there?

During a visit to an elementary classroom, 11 youngsters were working with a teacher aide on the bilingual program. The aide was using a basic Yup'ik reader as text and was asking questions from the teacher's edition. After trying to get responses from the students, the session concluded. The students were then given photo copies of prepared questions on which they worked for approximately 10 minutes. The aide made himself available to those who needed help in doing the assignment. The class period ended and the rest of the questions were left for homework. During this time, the teacher was doing work on the computer. Another seven students were quietly working in an adjoining room.

In a visit to a junior-high class in another smaller building, there were 11 students with a teacher. They were working on new words and their definitions. Students were asked to give the meaning and use in a sentence. The class seemed unwilling to volunteer responses.

A visit to the high school revealed that most of the students were on a field trip to Bethel to get acquainted with jobs and careers. In one classroom, seven students and a teacher were working on an English assignment. In the next room a teacher with three students was conducting a study hall.

Most of these classes reflected a fairly common approach to language education, in which instruction is oriented toward teaching about the language, rather than using the language as a living tool for communication. Yup'ik was just another subject added to the curriculum and as such had been disassociated from the community in which it derived its meaning and use. Even though the mission of the school district was "to ensure that all students master the basic skills, develop self-confidence, become self-reliant, possess knowledge of traditional Yup'ik ways, become fluent in Yup'ik and English languages, establish healthy life styles, become lifelong learners, and succeed in any environment," the students were in a highly passive environment where the qualities of self confidence, fluency, and success were in little evidence. It is no wonder that students are ambivalent about what the school is doing for them.

AOTE/Kitugiyaraq: The Way to Restore, to Reform

By 1996, the Yupiit School District board was concerned that many aspects of the district mission and goals that had been established through the AOTE process were not evident in the schools. Teachers were continuing to teach the way they were taught, and the problem extended to the whole school, not just to the Yup'ik cultural program. A new superintendent (Dr. John Weise from the neighboring Lower Kuskokwim School District) was brought on to help move the school district forward in its efforts to link schooling to the lives that students lived outside of school. Over the course of the following year, the district sponsored several meetings with school staff and community members as well as with invited experts in the educational field, in which they reaffirmed the critical importance of making changes for the betterment and empowerment of the Yupiat people. This gave an increased degree of community voice to the people, and a renewed commitment was made under the banner of "*Kitugiyaraq* — the way to restore, to reform."

With the support of the YSD School Board and communities, the superintendent submitted a proposal to the U.S. Office of Education, Alaska Native Programs office for a district-wide curriculum initiative titled "Yup'ik Education for the 21st Century." The proposal was approved and funding was awarded for three years, beginning in August

1997. The goal and objectives outlined in the original proposal are as follows (Weise, p. 24):

A. Project Goal

The goal of this project is to improve the educational performance of Yup'ik Eskimo students in the Yupiit School District by developing an integrated curriculum approach to learning more consistent with the Yup'ik subsistence lifestyle. The Yupiit School District proposes to use the EFG (Ecological, Futures and Global) curriculum model.

B. Project Objectives

The objectives to reach the stated goal are to:

1. Develop an administrative and policy infrastructure to support the development of a Yup'ik based educational curriculum using the EFG model.

2. Provide necessary training and orientation to the EFG curriculum and begin to develop teaching modules more consistent with the Yup'ik way of life.

3. Conduct, evaluate and improve ongoing teaching using the EFG model.

4. Evaluate the experience of the first two years with the EFG and decide to continue the program and become an EFG Certified School or return to the existing curriculum.

The Yupiit School District set out the following as the purposes behind its initiation of the EFG Curriculum Project and the benefits to be gained as a result of its implementation, as outlined in the original proposal (Weise, p. 23):

> This program will combine traditional Yup'ik customs and practices and modern communications technology to develop an educational curriculum that will prepare Yup'ik students for the 21st century. Student performance is expected to improve because their educational curriculum will be designed to have strong roots in Yup'ik culture and the local environment.
>
> By developing such a curriculum, Yup'ik students can have more immediate and relevant materials upon which to focus their learning. The expected result will be an increase in overall school performance. Students will also become more familiar with Yup'ik traditions.
>
> Students will gain an understanding of the unique contributions that Yup'ik people have made and can make in today's world. This will happen through the increased ability that modern communications technology affords us. Through

Internet communication with other students, through sharing results of their own (verified) research on Yup'ik tradition, culture, and ways, and through discovering that some of these are new and useful to other cultures will clearly point out for the students the real uniqueness and contribution of the Yup'ik culture to the world at large.

Finally, a long-range goal of the traditional villages within Yupiit School District is to train competent local people to assume jobs in the community. This will help the communities through the transition from dependence on welfare to reliance on income from gainful employment. The training of teachers aides in the use of modern communications technology will be used as the cornerstone of a locally planned Tribal College in Alaska. The Tribal College will eventually offer other technical training courses designed to prepare villagers for positions within the community.

The first year of the curriculum project has focused on in-service training for school staff and the formation of district and local level leadership teams (building on the AOTE experience) to guide and monitor the implementation of the project activities. The definition of Yup'ik values, traditions, and methods has gotten underway with an initial draft statement of traditional values that will continue to be developed and refined as the project evolves. Another step that has been taken is an outline of the teaching methods and approaches that reflect "Native ways of knowing." The Native teaching strategies that have been identified are as follows:

1. Use of local experts, elders, and parents
    - Consider taking small groups of students to the elders
    - Be aware that elders have a different timetable
2. Use of local values
3. Use of observation of the environment
4. Use of hands-on experience, which includes observing, practicing, applying, and demonstration
5. Use of sharing knowledge and teamwork
6. Sensitivity and use of seasonal activities and cycles
7. Use of Yup'ik language
8. Use of indigenous technologies and knowledge

As these traditional values and teaching strategies become more clearly delineated, the next step is to integrate them into the curriculum and teaching practices in the school. There is widespread interest and support for the integration of Yup'ik culture into all facets of the school operations, though the capacity to do so has not yet been achieved except in limited circumstances.

The curriculum development work began in earnest in November 1997 with clusters of teachers (including a team leader), aides. and sometimes community members proposing topics they thought could serve as a vehicle for integrating aspects of Yup'ik culture into the YSD curriculum. While the project proposal called for four or five modules to be developed during year one, in fact nearly 20 modules have been developed to varying degrees of completion, though only a few of them have actually been pilot-tested in the classroom/community.

A review of the current district curriculum to begin to adapt outcomes to fit the structure of the EFG curriculum has just begun and will become a major focus of activity during the second year. The EFG program development specialist and the YSD cultural curriculum director have identified nine thematic categories that will serve as a beginning point for linking the district outcomes, state standards, and EFG curriculum units together, and they have developed a sample matrix to illustrate how the various elements can be integrated into a comprehensive curriculum framework. A major portion of the work will focus on bringing all the elements of the YSD curriculum into a common structure, with the following headings providing the initial categories around which the work will be organized:

Survival
Cultural Expression
Community
Environment
Language
Subsistence
Family
Government
Health/Wellness

In pursuing this approach to curriculum development, YSD is making effective use of the previous seasons-based cultural curriculum work that has been done in the district, while at the same time it is incorporating many of the principles and precepts recently outlined in the "Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools" and the

cultural constructs embedded in the curriculum work of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative. In addition, integrated into all of the above work is the development of meaningful performance standards by which student work can be assessed, using both the Alaska Content/Performance Standards and the EFG Assessment Martix. It is not clear yet how all the elements in this complex puzzle will be reconciled, but the outlines of the essential tasks are slowly coming into focus, and the district has made the long-term commitment necessary to see the process through to implementation.

Based on the survey results and discussions with teachers and aides, however, there has been considerable variation in the level of understanding and involvement among the teachers and aides, as well as between schools. The unit-building process appears to have taken hold most readily in those schools where at least one teacher or principal assumed a strong leadership role, and that tended to occur more at the high school than elementary level. This was most noticeable in Akiachak, where nearly all of the unit-building activity was centered in the high school. All village sites produced several units, and at least one unit was fully (and apparently successfully) implemented at each site, so there is now a solid reservoir of exposure and experience spread throughout the district.

The participants who appear to have been most under-used were the aides and community members, several of whom expressed an interest in the goals of the project but sometimes felt left out as teachers took the lead in preparing the modules. At the same time, several teachers expressed the need for more community involvement to bring a Yup'ik perspective and knowledge base into the process. Most units had not yet reached the point of development where they have been adequately reviewed by the District Leadership Team, though this process has begun.

All of the future training and curriculum development work will require extensive give and take among all parties involved, to help facilitate the adaptation and integration of the EFG curriculum model into the Yup'ik cultural context of the three communities served by the Yupiit School District. The "Yup'ikizing" of the YSD/EFG curriculum is an essential ingredient for this project to be a success, in line with the mission of the school district and the goals and purposes of the project as outlined above. If the YSD curriculum is to retain a Yup'ik flavor, the model must be constructed from the bottom up, rather than from the top down, and it must be approached as a constantly evolving

process as new ideas, opportunities, and staff enter the picture. Important steps toward such cultural adaptation and integration have already been made with the development of the draft "curriculum matrix," which uses cultural constructs as the organizing categories for the curriculum and then links them to the state content standards and the EFG modules and lessons.

There is an obvious thread of continuity as the AOTE process has evolved into "Yup'ik Education for the 21st Century." The new curriculum efforts are a direct reflection of the mission and goals of the Yupiit School District and are intended to address some of the frustrations and ambivalence associated with the earlier AOTE efforts. Each step on this "long journey" increases the confidence of the communities and district that their goals are achievable and the future of the children in their care is bright, as citizens of the Yupiit Nation and as citizens of the world.

Near the end of the 1997-98 school year, a meeting of the School-to-Work/AOTE leadership team took place right after school in Tuluksak. There were representatives from Akiachak, Akiak, and Tuluksak. The meeting was attended by teachers, administrators, school staff, and five local residents. Also in attendance was the high-school dance team, which grew out of one of the EFG curriculum modules. Most of the time in the meeting was spent talking about activities associated with introducing students to various professions and careers. This was being done in the classroom as well as through visits to various businesses and agencies in Bethel, the nearby regional center. One area of particular interest was the inclusion of subsistence activities as a career option. The students were being taught skills for making tools as well as how to use them. It was the elders and villagers' insistence that prompted this segment. Each village had a special EFG curriculum project around which the instructional activities revolved. Sled building, making a sod house, and Yupiaq singing, dancing, and drumming were some of the themes. At the conclusion of the meeting, the high-school dance team performed the "AOTE dance" to everyone's delight.

"It Takes the Whole Village to Educate a Child"

Efforts are underway throughout rural Alaska to change education to fit the needs of the people and their worldviews. But change occurs slowly, and people need time to

digest that they are finally able to direct the goals of education and that they are a vital part of the educational process. Native people are assuming the responsibility to guide, plan, and implement an education that will give to their children an identity, purpose in life, and the opportunity to make choices about what they will to do to make a life and a living for themselves.

In general, the people of the Yupiit Nation/Yupiit School District viewed AOTE as being responsible for creating a high level of interest in the infusion of Yup'ik culture into the YSD curriculum, particularly on the part of community members. This was the basis for the selection of school improvement goals that were targeted by each of the villages, as well as much of the involvement that was generated from elders and community members. While there continue to be some significant differences of opinion regarding how to proceed in integrating the Yup'ik culture with the standard academic curriculum, the comment of one of the teachers that their task is to help students "walk in two worlds with one spirit" best signifies the direction in which the district is heading. For the majority of the teachers who originate from outside the communities and culture in which they are working, such a task poses a major challenge, but most see the need and appear to be willing to make the effort. Instead of the community having to make all the accommodation to meet the imported expectations of the school, at least one teacher was encouraged that "the school is finding its way to the community." For everyone involved, there is a growing recognition that the school cannot achieve its goals in isolation from the surrounding community, and that in fact it is a vital part of the health and well-being of the whole community.

The feature of the Yupiit schools that is being most impacted as a result of the AOTE project is the learning process that students are beginning to experience. As a result of the infusion of Yup'ik cultural perspectives into the curriculum, everyone in the communities has to take on the role of teacher, every place is a potential classroom, and every activity in the community constitutes a learning opportunity. From the vantage point of one of the teachers, the new curriculum provides an opportunity to move beyond the books and "apply knowledge to real life," while one of the parents sees it as a way to get beyond "testing our kids on what is not seen around them." From the perspective of one of the administrators, it means that "YSD would be last no more."

Although it is too early to determine the long-range impact of the new curriculum, the cultural report card, the esteem-building and language initiatives, and the active involvement of Yupiit community members in the education of their children, it is reassuring that the direction in which the Yupiit School District is moving to improve its schools is highly consistent with the emerging trends throughout the country to develop a closer working relationship between the schools and the communities they serve. The impact of the AOTE project on schooling in the villages of Akiachak, Akiak, and Tuluksak is best captured by the statement of a parent, summarizing the significance of the mission statement that had been adopted by the YSD board with a paraphrase of an African adage: "It takes the whole village to educate a child." The villages of the Yupiit School District are making that adage a reality.

A review of the original goals set out for the Alaska Onward to Excellence project at its inception in 1992 indicates that the project has been remarkably successful at maintaining its focus and making a significant difference in the schools, communities, and districts that have participated. The people of the Yupiit School District have also learned, however, that school improvement is a perpetual and iterative process that will require continued attention as old problems are resolved and new issues arise. In reflecting on the current status of the YSD school reform effort, Superintendent John Weise identified the following as outstanding issues the district will need to address as it goes into the new millennium:

1. The everyday use of the Yup'ik language in some communities has changed dramatically in the last few years, making it difficult to get a consensus on the role that the district should play in promoting the use of the language in the school. One village is now experimenting with a "dual immersion" approach, where a half of each day is taught in Yup'ik and the other half in English.
2. The student dropout rate in some schools continues to be too high, partly as a result of the tightening of rules, so there is a tension between keeping students in school where they may or may not be learning something, and driving them out of school where they most likely are not learning anything. Teachers are uncertain about how and how much to discipline the students.
3. The teacher turnover rate continues to be too high and is making it difficult to maintain continuity in curriculum and teaching practices. More local teachers are needed.
4. While the availability of technology has improved in recent years, the role that it should play in the curriculum is not yet clear. Teachers need guidance and training in the instructional possibilities that the internet and multimedia applications provide.

5. The influences of different churches within and between villages makes it difficult to get consensus on the introduction of Yup'ik cultural traditions such as dancing in the schools. Policies need to be developed to provide opportunities for those students with parental approval to be able to learn the traditional beliefs and cultural practices of their ancestors.
6. The role of the principal as an instructional leader has not been sufficiently articulated and delineated so that a whole school staff can work together on implementing long-term curricular change, including the administrative support and guidance to make it happen.
7. Schools in rural Alaska are struggling with the conflicting demands of top-down mandates from the state that promote standardization around limited subject matter goals on the one hand, and the desire and need for a locally relevant and culturally responsive approach to education on the other. The two should be able to complement one another, but not without some flexibility in state policies.

The Yupiit School District has taken on some of the most intractable problems facing rural schools in Alaska and has begun to develop a successful model for improving the performance of schools and students in Native communities. As a result of AOTE, Yupiit students are showing a greater interest in school and are beginning to show improvement in their academic performance as well as their sense of who they are and where they come from; Yupiit schools are working more closely with the parents and communities they serve; the Yupiit School District has the beginnings of a new curriculum through which it can better integrate the Yup'ik and Western knowledge systems it is called upon to transmit; and the Yupiit communities have enlarged their capacity and taken on the responsibility to define their own futures. Few school improvement efforts have achieved as much with so little in so few years.

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